

Campaigners hail government plans to ban gambling in games

Thursday 12 September, 2019

Today MPs have argued that so-called 'loot boxes' in video games for children should be regulated under gambling law and banned from children.

The feature, which allows players to stake real money for better weapons, player upgrades and gaming add-ons, has been dubbed as simulated gambling by campaigners which is fuelling a hidden epidemic of child gambling addicts.

Research from the GambleAware charity suggests that 55,000 children aged under 18 are addicted to gambling and the Safer Online Gambling Group's survey from August 2019 suggests that loot boxes and in-game purchases are costing Britain over £270m each year.

A report published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport today urges the Government to crack down on these gaming features which MPs call lucrative games of chance.

Adam Bradford, director of the Safer Online Gambling Group welcomed today's news. He said: "It is high time video games companies took responsibility for the highly addictive content they are putting in front of children. Our research this summer showed that this area is of serious concern to parents, with the average spend per young person estimated at £500-600 per year on these games, these practices are bankrupting young people before they become young adults. After my father's gambling addiction spiralled out of control and led him to jail several years ago, we are passionate about protecting the next generation from the harms of gambling addiction and that is why we have raised the alarm on this issue - we are delighted the Government has seen sense on this important issue."

The report today challenges the Government to prove why loot boxes should be regarded in a different way to any other gambling product.

Committee chair Damian Collins MP pointed the finger at game companies and social networking sites for their "relentless battle to capture ever more of people's attention, time and money".

He said: "Their business models are built on this, but it's time for them to be more responsible in dealing with the harms these technologies can cause for some users.

"Loot boxes are particularly lucrative for games companies but come at a high cost, particularly for problem gamblers, while exposing children to potential harm.

"Buying a loot box is playing a game of chance and it is high time the gambling laws caught up.

The report says it "struggled to get clear answers and useful information from companies across the games industry", describing them as "wilfully obtuse", but hopes the inquiry will focus minds on the potential harms.

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